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REDEVELOPMENT FOR URBAN POOR Assessing participatory strategies

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Abstract

Tensions are visible between spatial geography and the social order in contemporary city landscapes of both developing and developed countries. In Asian cities this 'dual geography' is visible where the rich seek protection within armed, gated communities with their shimmering high-rises away from or overlooking the organic, well-multiplied and established shanty settlements housing the urban poor. The vibrant informal sector within these shanty settlements constitutes 60 per cent of the city's economy (Burdett & Rode, 2007), yet people living there remain marginalized. The question arises as to whether this vibrancy of the informal sector can be put to an improved use by the urban poor themselves.

The purpose of this paper is to explore best practice in development strategies for urban poor. We examine a redevelopment project for urban poor in an Indian city. Here, a participatory approach has been used that searches for and identifies opportunities for socio-cultural, physical and economic wellbeing within the local context, offers alternate architectural technology using and interpreting local materials and skills, and involves the community from

the planning to construction stages. This approach aids in local skills development and provides a sense of ownership towards the built environment. The key aspects of this approach are discussed in the context of wider literature on collaborative participation. They further provide a foundation for examining development strategies for urban poor in Australia.

Although the contexts are totally different, with a view of re-development approaches in the developing and developed world, the paper attempts to find some common ground where synergies are visible for future improvement works, globally.

Introduction

By reviewing approaches for the re-development of poor urban areas through comparing and contrasting two case studies, one of an Indian community and the other of an Australian community, this paper tries to identify the key aspects that can bring resident participation. It further evaluates the way these approaches work differently in the context of the cities of developed and developing countries.

The first section illustrates a best practice example from a developing world city to establish key aspects of the participatory approach used for re-development. This was done by primary data collection of the site, visiting the location of re-development, documenting in the form of sketches, diagrams and photos, conducting survey/questionnaire and interviews with the stakeholders for the re-development work undertaken by them. The identified aspects provide a framework for exploring Australia's Victoria Neighbourhood Renewal Programme in the next section of the paper. Site-visits, documentation and records in the form of photos, desktop review of the available literature and semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders are used for analysis. However, in this brief paper we only provide a sample of photographs and a limited reference to personal communication.

Role of participatory re-development approaches for the urban poor

The world is urbanizing at a very fast rate. Almost three billion people live in cities - roughly half of the global population - and nearly 50 per cent of the world's poor are located in urban areas. Urbanization appears to be an irreversible trend, and poverty is no longer a predominantly rural phenomenon (Ambler, 1999, p. 28). Cities are dealing with social polarization and in today's global city we are seeing new geographies of the rich and the poor being created within contested urban space (Sassen, 2001).

The dual urban geography of rich and poor has economic, physical and social manifestations and an approach to target the three areas simultaneously becomes critical. The standard approach by governments is to respond on the basis of their perceived notions of the needs of disadvantaged communities and fails to take into account the issues specific to a particular community. In response to the failure of the traditional top-down planning approach, the idea of collaborative planning was introduced and launched by Healey (1997). His aim was to overcome the hierarchical and bureaucratic nature that primarily worked around centralized decision-making. Today's planning has brought the citizens into the decision-making process (Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1998; Healey, 1999).

Ife (1995) and Chaskin (2001) each contend that,

- Communities have a fresh perspective and can often see the problems in new ways;
- community involvement helps to deliver programmes which more precisely target local needs;
- the resulting projects are more acceptable to the local community;
- programme outputs which have been designed with input from local residents are likely to last longer because communities sense an ownership towards them; and

- the constructive involvement of communities in urban renewal helps to build local organisational skills, making it easier to develop strong successor organisations.

Interactive scenario planning workshops are considered as basic tools where inhabitants, planners, politicians, and stakeholders can identify, evaluate, learn, and collaborate regarding the problems and propose solutions for a successful planning project (Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1998 referring to Healey, 1992). Relationships, learning, reciprocity and creativity are the most significant outcomes of this approach (Innes & Booher, 2003). According to Innes and Booher (2003) reciprocity is the ability to develop actors' interdependence, creating recognition and identity. They also see a collaborative planning approach as a creator of relationships among and between actors as well as a process of learning from each other. This involvement and partnership with different actors and their knowledge is considered a way to create genuine innovation in the results and a means of reaching creativity.

Providing residents with skills to participate, encouraging them to express their views on local issues before plans have been drawn, establishing wide range of participation and representation structures can bring effective advancement in renewal programs. However, each of these methods needs to be adequately resourced over a lengthy period if community participation is expected to be effective and operative. Whilst it takes time to set up appropriate means of local residents' participation, it is vital to give them genuine authority in the renewal process and to search for motives of 'quick-wins' to fight disappointment (AHURI Research and Policy Bulletin, 2003).

Our goal in this paper is to outline an evaluative framework to measure these emerging collaborative efforts in terms of how economic, social and environmental institutions are altering our ability to administer our systems. The next section of the paper aims to address the haves and have-nots of the organized systems of the urban renewal programs considering the nature and role of resident participation. While undertaking this action, the paper will clarify the degree of success of effectively engaging residents into the process and the purpose of investigating two cases from developing and developed world by describing the outcomes of each project.

Developing country best practice: Ramdev Pir Tekro Development Project, Ahmedabad, India

The selection of the Ramdev Pir Tekro development for analysis is based on the fact that this community activity centre project has won over seven international as well as a national award for its aesthetics (design), creative use of construction material (engineering) and its response to environmental concerns (sustainability) (World Architecture Community (WAC), media release, 2009). The activity centre has been an effective role model to prove that cost is not a constraint but rather a creative challenge (World Architecture Community (WAC), media release, 2009). This section of the paper aims to identify the key aspects of the participatory planning approach used in the project that led to its success.

Urban centres of India produce nearly 27.4 million tonnes of waste daily, of which the business capital of State Gujarat, Ahmedabad alone contributes 2750 metric tonnes (World Architecture Community (WAC), media release, 2009). Unfortunately, the waste is dumped openly in landfill sites using enormous volumes of fossil fuel and creating an altered, polluted, unsafe and unhealthy landscape. To overcome this issue, Manav Sadhana, an NGO with a strong base in Ahmedabad, has attempted to undertake sustainability and capacity building alongside development of the built environment. This action and change was brought about by constructing the Activity Centre in the heart of Ramdev Pir Tekro, the largest squatter settlement in Ahmedabad. The fundamental concerns addressed were environmental management by utilizing the recycled waste as building components, empowerment of

weaker sections of the society and use of innovative and affordable building material and technology.

Ramdev Pir Tekro.

Tekro is home for more than 150,000 people (Pandya, 2006). Even though dwellers of Tekro have been living in the area for more than fifty years, they do not have any legal land tenure ship; the land belongs to the government. Initially there was no provision of basic infrastructure services such as electricity, footpaths, drainage, water supply and so on. At present, with the aid of NGOs and government interventions, the slum has many of the basic service provisions. However, due to problems with health issues, backward traditions, high-interest loans and illiteracy, many slum dwellers continue to live in a cycle of despair and poverty (Survey by Manav Sadhana, Vadiyari Vas settlement, 2008).



(A - Lack of basic infrastructure services, B – Lack of proper sewage, drainage, roads and footpaths, C – Small informal businesses run by women in their small temporary houses, D– Lack of educational and child care facilities).

Former scenario of Ramdev Pir Tekro

Source: Picture A from the website of Manav Sadhana, Pictures B, C and D taken by Neeti Trivedi (2010)

Manav Sadhana has initiated a pilot project to experimentally improve the physical environment of the area and the model will be adapted to the rest of the Tekro development in later phases. The focus of the development project is on sustainability, with the proposal geared towards:

1. Environmental management through recycling of waste;
2. Empowering women and children and providing them with skills of adding value to the waste by converting it in to various building components; and
3. Demonstration of affordable construction technology and building materials for low cost housing.



Manav Sadhana Activity Centre

Pictures taken by: Neeti Trivedi (2010)

An interesting part of the whole process is that before designing different building elements, special skills and building techniques have been studied in the Vadiyari Vas settlement. It is expected that these techniques will be reinterpreted in a way that will ensure the settlers' involvement during construction periods, leading to their ability to maintain their houses themselves (Survey by Manav Sadhana, Vadiyari Vas settlement, 2008).



Resident involvement during construction period, Manav Sadhana Activity Centre

Pictures taken by: Yatin Pandya (2006), Neeti Trivedi (2010)

The involvement of the resident in the project and the production of building materials out of recycled waste clearly display the capacity of the structure that can turn out to be an economic activity. It clearly demonstrates the possibility of becoming a cottage industry for financial independence and also the potential to enhance the quality of their homes using the affordable alternative building components (Pandya, 2006).

By promoting values, education and awareness among children and women of the Tekro, Manav Sadhana aims to eradicate many of the challenges and uplift the standard of living of the dwellers. Therefore, Manav Sadhana took the initiative of the project 'Manav Sadhana Activity Centre'. The multi-purpose activity centre serves as an informal school for young children, provides evening education for adults and serves as a training centre and activity workshop for the manufacturing of craft-based products by women and the elderly. These handmade craft-based products include paper bags, greeting cards, diaries, albums, envelopes and gift hampers which are sold commercially as 'Manav Sadhana Manufacturers' and the profit earned is distributed among the women workers. This empowerment project initiated by Manav Sadhana for the women, elderly and the children is known as 'Earn and Learn' and is

credited with bringing a major difference in the lives of the poor. The campus also includes a dormitory, an administrative unit and an all-religion meditation unit.

Since a huge waste recycling industry flourishes within the settlement, the main objective of the project was to develop innovative building components that use waste, simple hand operated tools, local resources and know-how.



Manav Sadhana Activity Centre

Pictures taken by – Dr Reena Tiwari

The three key outcomes of this initiative have been a less-polluting environment, affordable built forms and social as well as economic empowerment. Using municipal waste for building components reduces waste as pollution and since the recycled building components are 20-60 per cent cheaper and of higher quality than conventional materials, they provide affordable and superior quality building alternatives for the urban poor. (For the particular project mentioned above, the materials were produced in small quantities as a demonstration; if they were mass produced in a decentralized way they would render further economy) (Y. Pandya, personal communication) (Tiwari, 2009, p. 566).

The hidden value of economic empowerment for the community is one of the most important outcomes. With guidance, the community learns skills of reinterpreting waste materials and techniques and, is capable of using these skills when the next phase of individual housing development begins. The potential of the building becoming a cottage industry offers economic autonomy for the slum dwellers (Pandya, 2008).

Critical to the formation of personal and collective identity was the direct involvement of skilled craftsmen (potters were involved in making roof-tiles and fly-ash bricks), unemployed men (who collected city solid-waste and were involved in the construction labour work), housewives (who were involved in the labour work, in filling glass and plastic bottles with fly-ash and in decorating and painting interior and exterior walls of the centre), and children (who were given activities in their school craft classes). These efforts brought a sense of ownership towards the constructed centre (Pandya, 2008). Having active participation of local communities in all stages of the project becomes essential for its success: ‘the people know their community and its issues; they have to live with the results, and can, want and have the right to participate’ (Cities Alliance, 2003, p. 21). This participatory strategy begins from a realistic needs assessment and becomes a precondition of each stage of the project. With their

long-standing local associations, this is where the NGO's role as networkers becomes important. The next section discusses the key aspects of the participatory approach that made this project successful.

Key aspects of successful participatory process

1. **Response to local context:** Tekro's development project approach was specifically developed as a response to existing social conditions and the needs of the slum dwellers. As discussed in the section above, the Tekro development project's aim was to ensure sustainable development through mobilizing the community resources. It has been able to create viable models of community participation and modify technology to suit the project delivery models.
2. **Local materials and local skills:** Construction activity in the Tekro development project is managed by the slum community. As the project is constructed by the dwellers – local skilled craftsmen, unemployed men, housewives and children - utilizing their labour, skills and recycled materials, they understand the importance of proper maintenance of the services. The products developed for the project, which incorporate municipal/domestic waste and are prepared with simple hand operated tools, are demonstrated in the walls, roofs/slabs, doors and windows (Pandya, 2006).
3. **Community Involvement:** In the Tekro Development, the NGO plays a coordinating role between the community and local government agencies. Waste recycling skills of the dwellers have been highly valued in the project. Therefore Tekro dwellers were engaged in the upgrading project from the planning to the implementation phase. The positive result of such community participation in the upgrading process is that it has created a strong sense of ownership. Eventually, community members became involved in the day-to-day running and management of the Activity Centre.
4. **A Collaborative and systems approach:** The Tekro development model has set a good example of participatory planning and its benefits. A key objective of the project was to utilize the recycling and crafting skill of the dwellers. Manav Sadhana and Vastu Shilpa Foundation built a strong institutional network and engaged the slum community at each stage of the project. Vastu Shilpa researched the community's skills, devised construction techniques and trained the community accordingly. With the aid of the NGO and Vastu Shilpa Foundation, dwellers themselves implemented the project. At the maintenance phase, slum dwellers worked in collaboration with Manav Sadhana. The slum dwellers not only participated in maintaining the built structures but also continue to participate in various human development initiatives such as education, environmental cleanliness and so on (Pandya, 2006).

However, several other aspects of living could have been resolved had local government also participated. The missing element of the project was the partnership between local government and the NGO. All the efforts to make this project successful were channelled through the NGO Manav Sadhana and the role of the local government was negligible. The involvement of local government bodies and other legislative bodies is essential to reorient the planning and financial measures to facilitate resident involvement in meeting their own needs and aspirations. The issue of landownership and the threat of eviction are still unresolved and the attempts made by the NGO are in the hope that sooner or later these slums might be allowed to stay on the government land.

Whereas responding to local context, using local materials and local skills, involving the community at various stages of development and using a collaborative systems technique

becomes four key aspects of a successful participatory approach. Hereon we now examine an Australian case study in relation to this participatory approach framework.

Developed country scenario: Victoria Neighbourhood Renewal, Victoria

To narrow the gap between the most disadvantaged communities and the rest of the state of Victoria, after successful trials in 2001 in the Latrobe Valley and Wendouree West, the Neighbourhood Renewal was launched in 2002. Nineteen suburbs for renewal were identified wherein disadvantage was visible in high levels of unemployment, poor health status, low educational achievement, insufficient public transport and support services, excessive drug intake, high crime rates, family breakdown, and social stigma. The collective effect of these issues resulted in isolation of disadvantaged communities from the mainstream social, economic and political life (Klein, 2005).



Former Scenario of East Reservoir, Victoria Neighbourhood Renewal Community

Pictures taken by: Neeti Trivedi (2009)

In the past there have been many attempts in the Victorian neighbourhoods (Klein, 2005) to tackle individual problems like health and welfare services. They were short term, disconnected from local communities and economies and gave little stable change. However, in Victoria, the state government's renewal program has knotted responsibility and portfolios of individual government departments such as health, education, transport and housing to deal with community interdependence. Collectively with the joined-up government, residents were also engaged in identifying priority local issues, strategic planning and decision-making about services and social investment (Klein, 2005). On the whole the renewal project merged diverse bodies of government, businesses, community groups, local communities and residents in a whole-of-government and inter-sectoral partnership. The idea was to combine resources and ideas to tackle disadvantage and build interconnected and cohesive communities (Office of Housing, 2002; Klein, 2005, p. 2).

Each Neighbourhood Renewal project in Victoria implemented a six-point plan of action to:

- increase people's pride and participation in their community;
- lift employment and learning opportunities and expand local economies;
- enhance housing and the physical environment;
- improve personal safety and reduce crime;
- promote health and wellbeing; and

- increase access to services and improve government responsiveness. (Klein, 2005; Neighbourhood Renewal Evaluation Report, 2008)

The approaches and techniques applied by Neighbourhood Renewal to accomplish their aims and objectives have displayed its ability to transform the entire neighbourhood by putting people first and by responding to community priorities. Neighbourhoods facing challenges of run-down housing, degraded physical environment, health inequalities, poor educational attainment, high rates of unemployment, low level of economic activity, high crime rates, lack of engagement with police, unsafe environments, access to services, government responsiveness and social, political and economic segregation that unconsciously affects community participation, belonging and pride was ascertained to be completely altered. The initiative to tackle community challenges was achieved through a joined-up government approach and by combining community resources and ideas. Below is the description of the approaches undertaken to achieve six key objectives of Neighbourhood Renewal:

Neighbourhood Renewal has strengthened the ability of individuals as decision-making citizens. The program undertook community building simultaneously with community investment, involvement strategies for engagement with rational initiatives to renew disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Klein, 2005). In order to carry on the project, residents are initially expected to demonstrate civic responsibility by participating in decision-making processes (Cameron & Gibson, 2005). In the overall collaborative effort, residents have shown a stronger role in influencing local investment and service provision. Formally this is accomplished by local governance activities, which require the participation of 50 per cent local residents, as well as delegates from government and other stakeholders. By the end of third year, 60 per cent of residents were involved in the decision-making process (Adams & Hess, 2007). These engagements empower residents to participate in planning, decision-making about their main concerns for action, executing transformation with the assistance of government while assessing the success of local initiatives (Neighbourhood Renewal Evaluation Report, 2008).



Community engagement activities

Source: Growing Victoria Together Report (2002); Neighbourhood Renewal Evaluation Report, (2008); Trivedi, N., (2009)

Cameron and Gibson (2005) have documented in their paper, that residents are 'more skilled in knowing the problems of their communities'. The information and inputs transferred by residents and tenants through the advisory boards, meetings, surveys and workshops are the fundamental means for the government to know, to plan, actively resolve problems and to deliver services to the communities. Efforts in improving public housing and physical environment of the Neighbourhood Renewal communities has created liveable neighbourhoods and enhanced opportunities for the residents (Cameron & Gibson, 2005). This has resulted in 22 per cent increase in the acceptance of public housing and 8 per cent reduction in the social housing resident turnovers (Neighbourhood Renewal Evaluation Report, 2008).

Effective collaboration between residents, local government, Department of Planning and Community Development and the federal government has resulted in significant improvement in local amenities and community infrastructure. More than 100 projects have been undertaken consisting of the up gradation of 21 parks and reserves, development of 30 community hubs, organization of community activities, streetscapes, lighting and provision of basic services (Neighbourhood Renewal Evaluation Report, 2008). It was also reported that residents have acknowledged the improvements in the physical environment of their community (Adams & Hess, 2007).

These up gradations were undertaken by the unemployed local residents who were trained with work skills and engaged to renew their own communities (Thompson, 2005). Neighbourhood Renewal took the initiative to overcome the welfare dependence of the residents of Neighbourhood Renewal communities by improving access to quality education, jobs training, skill development, assistance in the growth of existing businesses and economic opportunities. Nonetheless, local community-based enterprises have been created in horticulture, recycling, construction, hospitality, commercial cleaning services, and gardening to help sustain employment outcomes and for the sustenance of the Neighbourhood Renewal works. 1000 community jobs including positions in construction, landscaping, streetscaping, information technology, hospitality and childcare has been created to employ one-third of local residents as the workforce for the community renewal. This initiative has encouraged residents to get trained and has also bestowed individuals with stability, encouragement and empowerment (Klein, 2005).

Improved employment opportunities, growth in economic benefits and good quality education have reduced insecurity among people. Residents have become more alert towards their community and have positively collaborated with police, community crime protection team, community strengthening by Neighbourhood Watch, anti-bullying, and violence prevention programs. Additionally, residents have supported and participated in programs like clean-ups, removal of graffiti, repairing of fences and signage, improvements in community parks, playgrounds, community centres and local shopping areas (Klein, 2005).

Improvements in parks and community gardens, reduction in crime, better health and welfare services and social connectedness have resulted in mental fitness, less stress, and reduction in the rate of diseases. Residents have also perceived improvements in the general health of their community and are enjoying their physical health (Adams & Hess, 2007). However, improved access to health and welfare services through community partnerships with local facility providers that is approachable and which suits the local interests have made a positive and rational impression about the government in the minds of the community. The government is seen as more responsive and accessible (Thompson, 2005).

The successes of these six key objectives of Neighbourhood Renewal were measured against a series of progress indicators combining administrative data.

For instance school absenteeism declined. Unemployment reduced to a significant degree - twice the rate in the rest of Victoria, wherein over 5000 jobs were created and provided to the residents. In addition to this, thirty-three community projects came into action rendering support and assistance to communities; providing training to people in developing their skills; these efforts further resulted in unfurling new directions to employment for the long run. The areas once considered as no-go-zones, scarred by graffiti, dilapidated buildings and run-down parks are places now where people want to live. By means of a massive investment by the government in public housing and community infrastructure, the entire area is now renewal and transformed into a dynamic place. Likewise, a significant number of public tenancies have decreased with people coming forward to inhabit in improved housing, counting to 7000 and over 100 infrastructure projects of renewal neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, improved urban design and direct control of the community has resulted in noticeable reduction in crime. However, the regular annual evaluation reports prove that Neighbourhood Renewal Project has resulted in building stronger communities wherein, the residents feel secured connected and in control of their lives. (Media statement by Richard Wynne MP, Minister of Housing, 2008; Neighbourhood Renewal Evaluation Report, 2008).



Victoria Neighbourhood Renewal

Source: Neighbourhood Renewal Evaluation Report, (2008); Neeti Trivedi, (2009)

Analysis of Victoria Neighbourhood Renewal Programme using the participatory approach framework:

1. **Response to local context:** Since the 2001 success in Wendouree West and Latrobe Valley, Victoria's Neighbourhood Renewal has been narrowing the differences between disadvantaged communities. The Programme now includes 19 communities across the rest of the state where there are high concentrations of public housing. These are areas of run down housing, growing rates of crime, low levels of education and employment, poor health, lack of adequate community infrastructure and access to services.

Within this context, the state government of Victoria came up with the solution of Neighbourhood Renewal by joined-up government plan partnering with the local residents for holistic and integrated responses to the complex problem of poverty and segregation. At the same time the program to transfer more power to the communities was initiated. Neighbourhood Renewal started 'new forms of organizing democracy which realign relations between government, markets and communities' (Adams & Hess, 2001, p. 20, 22). Transferring more decision-making powers (as discussed in p. 9) to the local residents was a crucial step by the Neighbourhood Renewal to create inclusive and healthy communities through better utilization and coordination of local resources and ideas.

2. **Community involvement:** Dr Harold Klein (2005), Victoria's Director of Neighbourhood Renewal, Department of Human Services, supports the idea that Neighbourhood Renewal is building the ability of local residents as decision-making citizens. The residents are encouraged to participate in planning and decision-making about priorities for action, to execute change with the support of government and in evaluating the success of local action (p. 4). Local residents are given jobs training and skill development and are employed in the beautification and refurbishment of their communities. The residents are also coming together to assist in educational programs, helping in surveys and administering their communities. Residents are participating in large numbers in their community barbeques, arts and cultural projects, festivals, community gardening and family fun days. The pictures below indicate community involvement and empowerment:



Victoria Neighbourhood Renewal Programme

Source: Neighbourhood Renewal Evaluation Report, (2008); Neeti Trivedi, (2009)

3. **Local Skills:** The Victoria Neighbourhood Renewal program provided unemployed local residents with work skills and employment to renew their community to a far greater extent (Klein, 2005 and Personal interview with Hill, Manager, Victoria Neighbourhood Renewal, 2009):
 - Local community based enterprises were created in Collingwood and Fitzroy projects in horticulture, recycling, construction, hospitality, information technology and childcare (Klein, 2005).
 - Resident guardians were employed by the Department of Human Services to implement safety plans. While creating more local jobs this strategy also helped in the reduction in crime, vandalism, domestic violence, etc., and led to improved safety.
 - A compulsory public tenant employment clause requiring the contractors to employ one third of local residents for commercial cleaning and gardening services was initiated.
 - A 16-week rent fees was provided to public housing tenants by the Office of Housing when they got a job, as a further incentive for people to move into the job market. Jobs in public housing refurbishment has resulted in a decrease in the public housing stock turnover in over one third of Neighbourhood Renewal locations and 90 per cent of areas have had an increase in the number of people who want to live in public housing (Klein, 2005).

Together with identifying and using local skills for local job creation these strategies have aided towards an overall improvement in the physical and social environment.

4. **Collaborative and a systems approach:** The Victoria Neighbourhood Renewal has utilized a whole-of-government approach to disadvantaged communities that consists of a better coordination between different government portfolios and is monitored by the State Coordination and Management Council. This has brought immense benefits in the areas of housing, jobs, infrastructure provision and safer streets (Thompson, 2005).

These benefits were investigated by assessing community residents with the help of an evaluation strategy, formulated within the first year of the Neighbourhood Renewal. The strategy was to measure whether the initiative has narrowed the gap

between disadvantaged communities and the rest of the State, to provide information to government, service providers, local communities and other stakeholders about which approach works and which does not, and most importantly, to contribute to community building by empowering local communities to take greater control of their neighbourhood and influence government decision-making (Neighbourhood Renewal Community Survey Guide, 2007).

The Neighbourhood Renewal surveys were conducted by the students of Swinburne University, Melbourne and various local academic institutions that have collaborated with Neighbourhood Renewal Projects across Victoria. In later stages, residents were trained and employed to conduct surveys in their respective communities. Annually, to evaluate the successes and failures of the initiative, face-to-face community survey of 300 local residents aged 18 and over 200 in smaller areas were conducted. Plus, 150 randomly selected residents were contacted for telephone surveys. Overall, these surveys assisted in generating statistically valid information specific to the project area (Smallwood, 2004; Klein, 2005). Below is the Table I with indicators and evidences of success, which shows that the initiative has been successful to some extent in reducing the disadvantage, social exclusion and in narrowing the gap between renewal locations and the rest of state:

Table I: Indicators and evidences of success of collaborative planning approach

Source: Neighbourhood Renewal Evaluation Report, (2008)

Indicators	Evidence
Residents see the neighbourhood as a good place to live.	23% perceived improvement in the physical built environment. 33% perceived improvement in housing conditions.
Feel pride and sense of ownership. Residents' interaction and participation in the community.	4% increase in perceived levels of community participation.
Residents perceive more education and training opportunities.	12% increase in further education qualifications.
Turnover of public housing tenants. Decrease in public housing density.	8% decrease in public housing turnover.
Residents perceive Neighbourhood Renewal has improved government responsiveness.	14% increase in resident perceptions that Neighbourhood Renewal has improved government performance.
Improved availability of services. Better local transport option.	22% increase in acceptance rates for public housing.
Improvement in the health of the neighbourhood.	14% of local residents reported improvement in the health by participating in the Neighbourhood Renewal activities. 6% reduction in substantiated cases of child protection.
More job opportunities.	4% reduction in unemployment from 17% to 13%, double the rate of reduction in unemployment for Victoria.
Decrease in absenteeism in school.	Reduction in average secondary school absenteeism by 3.5 days.
Residents' perceived neighbourhood as a safe place to live.	12% reduction in overall crime. 27% decrease in property crimes.

At a local level, partnerships formed between governments, businesses, residents, community groups and service providers support implementation of Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans with local communities through local Neighbourhood Renewal governance arrangements. The outcome has not always been conflict free. Heterogeneity, conflict and unpredictability among stakeholders during decision-making process were some of the major challenges that needed to be confronted (Klein, 2005).

The community reinforcement approaches and programs put into action by the Victoria Neighbourhood Renewal program is still in progress but the question remains unanswered whether the joined-up government will continue working with the same drive towards community development, as they have been working, rising over the graph since 2002, maintaining their sustenance and being persistent with time. It is apparent that collaboration between government and community can bring advancements and improvements if the commitment and efforts put in are genuine. It is also vital for the government bodies to make an unadulterated and unselfish investment to address the local apprehension of social and physical infrastructure. Overall, it is to be noticed that community participation strategies in the re-development process is not a panacea, the process can be a tool to create space and to build autonomous, self-driven, less policy and frameworks focused organizations and practices for the residents decision making.

Conclusion

Lefebvre's notion of 'right to the city' is about empowering the users of the space (Lefebvre, 2002). Raising awareness in the community - engaging civil society so that it can connect with its local environment - stimulates a sense of belonging and identity essential to the healthy development of a living environment as well as its preservation. Encouraging creative communities is important for making successful cities. In some ways contradicting the role of the designer, the purpose is to recognize the user as a potential resource and involve him/her as a positive design development tool in the process. This perception will help us transform houses into homes, shelters into character, clusters into community, enclosures into events and buildings into living environments (Pandya, 2006).

To overpower the issues of upgrading one theme should be constantly referred to – participation of the residents - the people whose territory is being affected. The Tekro Project and the Victoria Neighbourhood Renewal Project from the beginning have stressed that the formulation of the upgrade must come from below. The upgrade becomes more effective and makes maximum use of the resources. Each project discussed has been successful in socially empowering the communities, bringing a localized, collaborative and holistic approach. Principles of participatory development strategy that are inclusive of a localized response, utilization of local skills, community involvement and systems approach are reflected in each of the projects. In today's developmental systems, these projects from both the developing and developed world have attempted to transform these communities into institutions: self-sufficient, with the capacity to build up individual organizational structures, ability to accept measures and changes and to recruit entrusted professional practitioners.

The projects have demonstrated that a user-centric approach to derive local solutions becomes effective in taking the initial steps towards bridging the gap between rich and poor. In contemporary cities displaying dual geographies, it becomes necessary to enterprise on achieving social empowerment so that the whole community – mainstream and marginalized – is involved in the decision-making, empowered to take responsibility and resolve problems. The agenda then is to find ways of merging public good, private initiative and community concerns in an entrepreneurial manner. This is vital in negotiating the urban space as a civic space instead of a territory of conflict between the rich and poor.

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